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BEATA BEATRIX.

Bell's Miniature Series of Painters

ROSSETTI

BY
H. C. MARILLIER



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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

DANTE GABRIEL, or, to give him his full christening name, Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti, was born on May 12th, 1828, at No. 38, Charlotte Street, Portland Place, and was the second of four children, born in successive years. Gabriele Rossetti, his father, was a native of the city of Vasto, in the province of Abruzzi. He was a man of superior ability and force of character, and was at one time custodian of bronzes at the Naples Museum; but having made himself obnoxious to the Bourbon King Ferdinand during the suppression of the constitution in 1821, he was in consequence proscribed and obliged to fly for safety. Assisted by a British man-of-war in escaping to Malta, Gabriele Rossetti remained there for some time, practising as an instructor in his native language, until further annoyance drove him in 1824 to England. Here

he settled, and obtained an appointment as Professor of Italian at King's College. Meantime, in 1826, he had married a daughter of Gaetano Polidori, for some while secretary to the notable Count Alfieri, and father of that strange being, Dr. John Polidori, who travelled with Byron as his physician, and committed suicide in 1821. Gaetano Polidori's wife, Rossetti's grandmother, was an Englishwoman, whose maiden name was Pierce. To his parentage the young Gabriel was indebted for much, but especially to his mother. One can judge of the latter's quiet sensible character, and deep religious instincts, from the portraits left us by her son. But, besides these qualities, she possessed good literary and artistic judgement, shrewd knowledge of human nature, and a fund of common sense which was strong enough to prevent the somewhat mystical spirit pervading the thoughts of her young family from deteriorating into morbid and unhealthy channels. Between D. G. Rossetti and his mother the warmest and most affectionate relations prevailed, relations that were only severed by the former's untimely death on April 9th, 1882. Mrs. Rossetti survived her son exactly four years to the very day. Her husband had died in April, 1854, honoured at the last as a

patriot in his native land. Their elder daughter, Maria, departed this life in 1876, and in December, 1894, Christina Rossetti also died, leaving as sole survivor of this brilliant family the younger son, William Michael, well known as a literary critic and as the biographer of his more famous brother.

Albeit English in its main external features, the environment of the Rossetti family in London remained essentially Italian during their father's lifetime. Gabriele Rossetti was a commentator on Dante, and himself a writer of verse, mainly in a politico-patriotic vein. To the ears of the young Gabriel, familiarized by habit with the sonorous metres of the "Inferno" and "Paradiso," the name of Dante for many years conjured up no very stimulating thoughts. It was not until he had begun as a young man to read upon his own lines, that the pictorial richness and splendour of the Florentine dawned on him and seized him with its spell. "The 'Convito,'" he says, "was a name of dread to us, as being the very essence of arid unreadableness,"—an interesting fact to remember when dealing, as we shall presently have to do, with the influence which Dante was destined afterwards to exert upon two members at least of the family.

Reared in this studious atmosphere, however, it is not to be wondered at that the young Rossettis early took to literature. Before they were six years old they had made acquaintance with Shakespeare and Scott, in addition to the usual works of childhood, and were steeped in romance of a more lofty kind than is common at such an age.

Of Rossetti's early literary efforts it is sufficient to mention two: "The Slave," a bombastic drama in blank verse, which occupied his faculties at the age of five, and "Sir Hugh the Heron," a legendary poem founded on a tale by Allan Cunningham. These two productions do not sum up the juvenile work of Rossetti of which a record has been kept, but they are quite as much as it is fair to mention, and serve sufficiently to show the romantic drift of his earliest ideas. In art he was scarcely less precocious; a pretty story being told of a milkman, who came upon him in the passage sketching his rocking-horse, and expressed considerable surprise at having seen "a baby making a picture." Drawings of this date exist, and also later ones done when he was in the habit of preparing illustrations for books he read and for his own romances. In point of quality, however, these juvenile sketches are not to be compared with those of many masters of the

brush who began early, for example with those of Millais, and are chiefly interesting in connection with a statement of his brother that "he could not remember any date at which it was not an understood thing in the family that Gabriel was to be a painter."

In 1837, after a short preliminary training at a private school, Dante Gabriel was admitted to King's College, where his father was Italian professor. His artistic training did not begin until 1841 or 1842, when he left school, and entered himself at a drawing academy known in those days as "Sass's," and kept by Mr. F. S. Cary, son of the translator of Dante. He remained some four years at Cary's Academy, during which period he seems to have acquired the bare rudiments of his art and to have made a small reputation for eccentricity. In July, 1846, having sent in the requisite probation-drawings, he was admitted to the Antique School of the Royal Academy. His first appearance is graphically delineated by a fellow-student, whose observant eye has preserved for us a probably accurate conception of the fiery young enthusiast:

"Thick, beautiful, and closely-curved masses of rich brown much-neglected hair fell about an ample brow, and almost to the wearer's shoulders;

strong eyebrows marked with their dark shadows a pair of rather sunken eyes, in which a sort of fire, instinct with what may be called proud cynicism, burned with furtive energy. His rather high cheekbones were the more observable because his cheeks were roseless and hollow enough to indicate the waste of life and midnight oil to which the youth was addicted. Close shaving left bare his very full, not to say sensuous lips, and square-cut masculine chin. Rather below the middle height, and with a slightly rolling gait, Rossetti came forward among his fellows with a jerky step, tossed the falling hair back from his face, and, having both hands in his pockets, faced the student world with an *insouciant* air which savoured of thorough self-reliance. A bare throat, a falling, ill-kept collar, boots not over familiar with brushes, black and well-worn habiliments, including not the ordinary jacket of the period, but a loose dress-coat which had once been new—these were the outward and visible signs of a mood which cared even less for appearances than the art-student of those days was accustomed to care, which undoubtedly was little enough."

As a student in the dry atmosphere of the Academy Antique School Rossetti proved a

failure, and never passed to the higher grades of the Life and Painting classes. Conventional methods of study were distasteful to him, and the traditions of the Academy were especially arid and cramping to the imagination. It will be necessary later on to give some description of the state into which the art of painting had fallen in England before the fresh minds of the young romantic school, breaking away under Rossetti's leadership, caused such a turmoil and revolution; but in the meantime, at the period we are dealing with, it is probably correct to say that Rossetti grew tired of, rather than disapproved of, the teaching in the school, that he was full of ideas craving utterance on canvas, and that he wanted to paint before he could properly draw. This impatience caused him to take a momentous and curious step, which certainly entailed harm to him as a technical executant, though it may indirectly have furthered his career as an artist. He decided to throw up the Academy training, and wrote to a painter of whom not many people at that date had heard, but whose work he himself admired, asking to be admitted into his studio as a pupil. This was Ford Madox Brown, and for his own particular needs and line of thought Rossetti could have

lighted upon no man more absolutely suitable. Madox Brown was only seven years Rossetti's senior, but he had studied abroad at Ghent, Antwerp, Paris, and Rome, and had exhibited during the early forties some fine cartoon designs for the decoration of the new House of Lords. The pictures by Brown which Rossetti had seen, and which he mentioned in writing, were the *Giaour's Confession*, exhibited at the Academy in 1841, *Parisina* (1845), *Our Lady of Saturday Night*, and *Mary Queen of Scots*, of which he remarked, "if ever I do anything in art, it will certainly be attributable to a constant study of that work." This, and other rather florid compliments of the same sort, may well have impressed Madox Brown, who was not accustomed to be complimented, with a shrewd idea that he was being made fun of; and the story has been told how, in a suspicious frame of mind, he armed himself with a stick and went forth to seek his unknown correspondent. On arriving at the house he was partly reassured by a door-plate; and the evident sincerity and enthusiasm of the boy himself, when they met, overcame his generous warm-heartedness, and made him agree to take Rossetti into his studio, and to teach him painting, not for a fee, which he declined, but

for the sheer pleasure of encountering and training up a sympathetic spirit.

Before following his fortunes further in this direction we must go back and note what Rossetti's activities in literature had amounted to during this period. These are no less than astonishing. To take the greatest first, they include the bulk of the verse translations from the early Italian poets, first published in 1861, and afterwards republished under the altered title of "Dante and his Circle." Although worked on and revised from time to time, these translations remain in all essentials much as Rossetti compiled them between the years 1845 and 1849, and they rank among the finest work of the kind in the English language, being no less remarkable for their high poetic qualities than for the subtle dexterity of phrase by which the sound and sense of the originals have been transplanted into a naturally colder tongue. Rossetti's translation of the "Vita Nuova" alone might stand as a monument of industry in such a case, for it breathes a new spirit of language, a voluptuous and exotic style such as has never been excelled for conveying the emotional mysticism and introspective sentiment of a southern lover; but to this he added that great mass of verse translations and

sonnets, involving many days spent over musty volumes at the British Museum. Even this was not all, for between the same years he began a translation in verse of the Nibelungenlied, and finished a translation of von Aue's "Arme Heinrich," which has been thought worthy of a place amongst his collected works. Besides these, in 1847, before he was nineteen years old, he had written his best-known poem, "The Blessed Damozel," together with several others, including, "My Sister's Sleep," "The Portrait," and considerable portions of "Ave," "A Last Confession," and the "Bride's Prelude." The performance of these literary efforts is so finished, the sentiment so profound and mature, that one can hardly understand the ambition which kept painting in the foremost place and made poetry the *parergon*. The ease with which versification came to Rossetti may have blinded him at first to the merits of his work in this art, as happened later in the case of William Morris; but however that may be, he was not encouraged to abandon painting as a means of livelihood, and having made the arrangement already described with Madox Brown, he settled down with a characteristic mixture of enthusiasm and despair to the pursuit of art.

Much as he owed to him in the way of instruction and sympathetic encouragement, Rossetti did not remain long in Brown's studio, at all events as a regular attendant, but left him after a few months to share a studio with Mr. Holman Hunt. The beginning of this intimacy was curious and typical. On the opening day of the Academy Exhibition (May, 1848) "Rossetti," says Mr. Hunt, "came up boisterously and in loud tongue made me feel very confused by declaring that mine was the best picture of the year. The fact that it was from Keats (the picture was *The Eve of St. Agnes*) made him extra-enthusiastic, for I think no painter had ever before painted from this wonderful poet, who then, it may scarcely be credited, was little known." Rossetti begged to be allowed to visit Hunt, for at the Academy schools they had barely been acquainted, and, as an upshot of the acquaintance, agreed to work for a time with him, sharing for this purpose a studio which the latter had just taken in Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square. Here (as well as later in a studio which he took for himself at 83, Newman Street) Brown, whose friendship continued to the end of Rossetti's life, visited him from time to time, and gave him the benefit of his advice; and here, amid what Mr. Hunt has described as the most

dismal and dingy surroundings, Rossetti began to paint his first real picture. The year 1848 marks his transition artistically from boyhood to adolescence, an adolescence in which depth of feeling and height of aspiration transcended the power of accomplishment, and no artificial mannerisms obscured the seriousness of purpose that characterized, not him alone, but the whole of the small band of workers with which he presently became associated. The formation of this band, and the painting of Rossetti's first picture, bring us to the story of the famous Pre-Raphaelite movement, and will more properly serve to begin a new, than to end a preliminary chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE "PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD"

IN relating afresh the history of the "Pre-Raphaelite" movement, one has many precedents to choose from. According to the point of view selected one may see in it the conscious expression of a great artistic revival, deliberately planned by a body of zealots, and based upon a structure of lofty principles; or one may go to the opposite extreme and regard it merely as an exuberant freak, an irresponsible outburst on the part of a few impulsive youths linked together for one brief moment by a mutual combination of enthusiasm and high spirits. For both of these points of view ample authority might be quoted, and the truth as usual lies somewhere safe between them.

The tendency has been, on the whole, not unnaturally, to exaggerate the significance of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood," which after all was but the grain of mustard seed from which a

great tree sprung. Its formation came about in the following way. We have noted the somewhat sudden alliance between Rossetti and Holman Hunt, and their plan of sharing a studio to carry out work in common. Through Hunt, Rossetti had become acquainted with Millais, and had joined, or helped to start, a "Cyclographic Society," numbering several members, to wit, Thomas Woolner, F. G. Stephens, Walter Deverell, John Hancock the sculptor, James Collinson, William Dennis, J. B. Keene, and some four or five besides. The scheme was for members to contribute drawings to a portfolio which was sent round for all the rest to criticise. Like other institutions based upon mutual candour, this society enjoyed a very brief existence, and was mainly of service in weeding out those who did not sympathize with the new ideas which were ripening in Rossetti and his friends from those who did. The final development of these ideas was brought about by a meeting at Millais's home in Gower Street, where the three alighted upon a volume of engravings after the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa. Ruskin has spoken scornfully of this work as "Lasinio's execrable engravings," but whatever their quality they at least served to show that in the earlier men, who

preceded Raphael, there was a feeling for earnest work, a striving after lofty expression, which was worth more as an inspiration than the stereotyped fashion of painting which had come into vogue in England. Why this mechanical cult should ever have become grafted on to the ill-used name of Raphael, and shadowed by his stately fame, is a difficult matter to explain, and requires an excursus into the history of European art. Its effect on the teaching of the day, however, is summed up in the following incisive passage by Ruskin:

"We begin, in all probability, by telling the youth of fifteen or sixteen that Nature is full of faults, and that he is to improve her; but that Raphael is perfection, and that the more he copies Raphael the better; that after much copying of Raphael, he is to try what he can do himself in a Raphaelesque, but yet original manner: that is to say, he is to try to do something very clever, all out of his own head, but yet this clever something is to be properly subjected to Raphaelesque rules, is to have a principal light occupying one-seventh of its space, and a principal shadow occupying one-third of the same; that no two people's heads in the picture are to be turned the same way, and that all the

personages represented are to have ideal beauty of the highest order, which ideal beauty consists partly in a Greek outline of a nose, partly in proportions expressible in decimal fractions between the lips and chin; but partly also in that degree of improvement which the youth of sixteen is to bestow upon God's work in general."

This canting and misdirected worship of Raphael by men who had discarded his spirit, and the realization that before Raphael there were painters of lofty aim, may well have determined the title under which the three enthusiasts conspired to band themselves in revolt. From most points of view it was unfortunate. It meant very little in actual fact, it was misleading so far as it did mean anything, and it was responsible for much of the acrimony and abuse which the devoted trio afterwards brought down upon their most meritorious efforts. One curious feature of the matter is that they appear to have possessed between them at this time a comparatively slight acquaintance with pre-Raphaelite pictures, not more, perhaps, than the average intelligent visitor to the National Gallery to-day. Scarcely anywhere in their writings (we must except one article by Mr. F. G. Stephens) do we find praise, or even mention, of most of the great

pre-Raphaelite painters. Nothing of Mantegna, Botticelli, Bellini, Orcagna, Fra Angelico, Melozzo, Lippo Lippi, or Piero della Francesca. At a slightly later date Rossetti visited Bruges, and fell in love with Memling; but his letters even then reveal some very crude preferences in art. Whatever was perceived or imagined in the work of the men they decided to follow must have been largely a matter of instinct, backed up by a strong sympathy for the naïve and simple charm of the few early Italian pictures which they had seen. It is a mistake to suppose that what Rossetti and his companions admired or sought to imitate in these old masters was their mediaeval and primitive style of painting. The mediaeval quality proved infectious, no doubt, and may have influenced all more or less at first in the direction of angularity and awkward composition. But there were other causes which also contributed to this. Amongst them may be mentioned an idea that for every scene an actual unidealized room or landscape must be painted, and the figures grouped without reference to arrangement; also that for each figure a definite model must be taken and followed even to the extent of blemishes. This counsel of perfection, if it was ever seriously accepted, was certainly

not followed even from the first; but the fact of its proposal shows the austere lines upon which these youthful painters proceeded, and helps to explain what many people have found a stumbling-block, the lack of grace and harmony in some of their earliest compositions. What they sought to follow in the old Italian models, however, with all their archaism and immaturity of skill was the honest striving after nature, sincerity of style, decorative simplicity, and, by no means least, the pious selection of worthy subjects. It is this last quality, exhibited alike by all the members of the Brotherhood, that more plainly than anything marks the cleavage between their "pre-Raphaelite" work and the commonplace painting of the day. They set themselves to paint great and ennobling subjects, often greater than they could achieve, out of their imagination, when the rest of the world (always excepting men like Madox Brown, who belonged to them in spirit) were painting what Ruskin calls "'cattle-pieces,' and 'sea-pieces,' and 'fruit-pieces,' and 'family-pieces'; the eternal brown cows in ditches, and white sails in squalls, and sliced lemons in saucers, and foolish faces in simpers."

In the inauguration of the "Brotherhood" Rossetti took a specially active part, and the title

itself was invented by him. "Rossetti," says Mr. Hunt, "with his spirit alike subtle and fiery, was essentially a proselytiser, sometimes to an almost absurd degree, but possessed, alike in his poetry and painting, with an appreciation of beauty of the most intense quality." Mr. Hunt adds that the title of "Pre-Raphaelite" was adopted partly in a spirit of fun, and, like other names which have acquired honour, was originally a term of reproach invented by their enemies. On this account they prudently decided to keep it secret, and to let no outward symbol of their union appear beyond the mystic initials P.R.B., which were to be used on all their pictures and in private intercourse.

The next step was to enroll sympathetic fellow members. Besides the three founders of the Brotherhood, Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt, four more or less active adherents were enlisted. Hunt introduced Mr. F. G. Stephens, who at that time was a painter, but very soon abandoned art for criticism. Woolner, the sculptor, whose contributions to the movement were mainly poetical, was introduced by Millais, or possibly Rossetti; and the latter certainly was responsible for the remaining two recruits, his brother and James Collinson. Collinson, a torpid

member at the best, and elected apparently on the strength of one picture which Rossetti thought "stunning," was mainly useful as a butt to the others, who used to make fun of his sleepy nature and drag him all reluctant from his bed to go for midnight walks. Shortly afterwards, being seized with religious propensities, he vacated his membership and retired to Stonyhurst.

For the doings of the Brotherhood the curious reader will do well to consult the "Memoirs" and the "Rossetti Papers" published by Mr. W. M. Rossetti. Mr. Rossetti, not being an artist, was himself elected secretary, and with business-like care preserved in a diary all the daily and weekly occurrences that came under his notice. It is sufficient to say here that the weekly attendances of the Brethren, at first a constant source of pleasure and mutual help, had become very irregular by December, 1850, that an attempt was made to revive them in January, 1851, but without effect, and that Millais's election to the Academy in 1853 gave a final quietus to the organization, which for some time previously had ceased to exist save in name. The ranks of the Brotherhood had not even remained intact. In addition to Collinson, it had

lost Woolner, who went to Australia when the emigration craze was at its height. To replace the former a young painter, Walter Howell Deverell, had been nominated, but his election was regarded by some as invalid. Deverell, whose picture of Viola and the Duke in *Twelfth Night* remains an almost solitary testimony to his genius, unhappily died young. He possessed many graces of appearance and manner, and was in all respects a fascinating personality. Behind the Brotherhood, and hitherto unmentioned, we seem to catch a glimpse of another very gracious, but retiring figure, that of Rossetti's sister Christina, who in addition to her deeply religious and poetic gifts, possessed a quiet fund of humour to be expended on the events that occurred within her little circle.

We left Rossetti, in order to describe the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, at the point where he had just settled down in a joint studio with Holman Hunt to paint his first picture. In an enthusiasm for community of action, and a spirit of devotion to Keats, it had been proposed that each of the Brethren should illustrate, by an etching, a scene from that poet's "Isabella." Hunt, however, was already engaged upon his picture of *Rienzi*; Millais had work of

a less than Pre-Raphaelite character to finish off, and Rossetti himself was seized with desire to paint a subject which much commended itself to his mystical and symbol-loving mind, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. The only one of the three eventually, who touched Keats that year (1848) was Millais, who achieved a triumph with the striking picture, *Lorenzo and Isabella*.

Rossetti's subject, as can well be imagined, gave him endless trouble, and was a source of violent fits of alternate depression and energy. Madox Brown's diary, a document full of dry humour and quaint touches, to say nothing of its pathos, contains many anecdotes of Rossetti's exasperating changefulness and want of consideration which show that kindness did not blind the painter to his pupil's foibles. To Brown's description of Rossetti, "lying, howling, on his belly in my studio," and, at another time, reduced by struggles with impossible drapery to an almost maudlin condition of profanity, we may add Hunt's description of how he had solemnly to take his companion out for a walk and explain that if the interruptions of temper and multiplication of difficulties did not cease, neither of them would have a picture finished to show alongside of Millais's—a remonstrance which he

says was effectual and taken in perfect good part.

So by the following spring (1849) all three pictures were ready for exhibition, and were hung, Millais's and Hunt's in the Academy, and Rossetti's either from choice or necessity in the so-called Free Exhibition held in a gallery at Hyde Park Corner. Here it was bought for £80 by the Marchioness of Bath, in whose family an aunt of Rossetti's was acting as governess. The picture is on many accounts a favourite one with lovers of Rossetti's work. Considering the painter's age and want of proper training, it is a masterly performance. The scene shown is a room in the Virgin's home, with an open balcony at which her father, St. Joachim, is tending a symbolically fruitful vine. On the right of the picture, are the figures of the Virgin and her mother seated at an embroidery frame. The young girl, a most untypical Madonna, in simple gray dress with pale green at the wrists, pauses with a needle in her hand, and gazes with a rapt ascetic look at the room before her, where, as if visible to her eyes, a child-angel is tending a tall white lily. Beneath the pot in which the lily grows are six large books bearing the names of the six cardinal virtues. These, and a dove

perching on the trellis, are amongst the peaceful symbols of the picture, whilst the tragedy also is foreshadowed in a figure of the cross formed by the young vine-tendrils and in some strips of palm and "seven-thorned briar" laid across the floor. Rossetti painted the calm face of his mother for St. Anna, and his sister Christina for the Virgin, giving her, however, in contravention of the rule mentioned above, golden instead of dark brown hair.

Although 1848 is intrinsically the year of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, much of the work of the next two years comes within the scope of its influence. As an example may be cited the important pen-and-ink drawing called *Il Saluto di Beatrice*, representing in two compartments the meeting of Dante and Beatrice, first in a street of Florence and secondly in Paradise. The whole composition was repeated in oil in 1859, and the meeting in Paradise formed the subject of more than one separate drawing. The cream of Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite work, however, during the two years subsequent to 1848, is the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, a sequel in sentiment to his picture of the previous year. This is well known to frequenters of the National Gallery at Millbank, and is described elsewhere. It was



ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI.

exhibited in 1850 under the same auspices as its predecessor (though the gallery this year was moved to Portland Place), and was priced at £50. Its appearance was the signal for a storm of abuse and raillery, which descended with impartial violence also upon the pictures of the other "Pre-Raphaelites" exhibited at the Academy, and pursued them relentlessly until time and success finally established their position.

It would serve no purpose to go again and at length into the nature of this attack. Charles Dickens and many other great men lent their names to it, and the Brethren were compelled to face evil days in consequence. But in the darkest hour a saviour appeared. Ruskin, who before the outcry hardly knew of the existence of the school, had his attention drawn to it by Coventry Patmore, and with characteristic fearlessness and energy plunged into the fray. In a series of letters to the "Times" he defended the artists at all points, from the charge of being ignorant copyists and realists, the accusation that they could not draw, the alleged conspiracy against Raphael, and finally from the subtlest insinuation of all, because it sounded so professional, the charge that they knew not the laws of perspective. This ardent championship had one curious effect. In his

warmth of defence Ruskin had not only combatted the statement of faults, but had revelled in laying down an elaborate statement of principles. Thus it came about that the original ideas out of which the Brotherhood had grown, ideas of a broad and possibly nebulous character, became transmuted into hard and fast rules of conduct and of practice, which the Brotherhood more or less had to accept, partly perhaps out of gratitude to their benefactor, partly because they agreed with them in theory, and partly because they may not have seen how far they led.

On the other hand, if we are not to credit the "Pre-Raphaelites" with all the fine sentiments attributed to them in Ruskin's inspired defence, it is absurd to imagine, as some have done, that they failed to take themselves or their work seriously because Rossetti in his family letters used to speak flippantly of his unlucky little picture, which, like a curse, had come home to roost. Men often enough speak lightly to friends of things which have lain at the heart; and if Rossetti joked to his brother about "the blessed eyesore" and "the blessed white daub," it is none the less true that he had striven to put all his thoughts and all his knowledge into it, with such success that it reveals to us to-day an

intensity of feeling and reverence which few modern painters have emulated, and to which Rossetti in his later work did not always attain.

A characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood which has not yet been touched on, and which here calls for digression, was its remarkable literary strength. Of the seven original members, two—W. M. Rossetti and Stephens—were writers by preference. The former did not paint at all. Gabriel Rossetti was, as we have seen, a poet before he could be called a painter, and a poet of the first order. Woolner also was a poet, and in this capacity alone belonged to the movement. Collinson made a third; Deverell a weak fourth. Millais and Hunt showed no inclination this way; but, besides those mentioned, the coterie included Christina Rossetti, William Bell Scott, Coventry Patmore, and Madox Brown, who wrote occasionally in verse. Even without the need of a propaganda such a body was almost bound in the nature of things to produce literary thought allied in sentiment with its artistic ideas and aims. Hence came about the "Germ," that much-prized periodical, which had its origin in the fertile brain of Rossetti, and which was ostensibly formed to be the organ of the P.R.B., and to spread its opinions. The first number

included "My Sister's Sleep" and the prose romance, "Hand and Soul," by Rossetti. Subsequent numbers contained "The Blessed Damozel," "The Carillon," "Sea Limits" (under its first title of "From the Cliffs"), and six or seven sonnets. Of the four numbers published the first two only were called "The Germ," the title in the third and fourth being altered to "Art and Poetry" at the suggestion of the Tupperts, who as printers of the magazine had taken over the responsibility on generous terms.

The "Germ," as its brief career sufficiently denotes, fell almost stillborn upon an ungrateful world; but amongst a small class of artists and admirers it undoubtedly served to strengthen Rossetti's reputation. There was nothing feeble or immature about the poetical ideas expressed in it, and one may even be surprised that such an original piece of work as the "Blessed Damozel" did not attract greater attention. Both it and "Hand and Soul" have frequently been reprinted. The latter is interesting for the light it throws upon Rossetti's mediaeval and mystical mind. To some extent it is an autobiographical record, a memory of mental perturbations and experiences which beset the young painter, striving to preserve and foster the spiritual side of his

nature at the expense of more than commonly strong bodily inclinations. From an abstraction like this story of the mythical young painter Chiaro dell' Erma we may feel we get one truer glimpse of the real Rossetti than any number of life-histories, overlaid with trivial incidents which obscure rather than reveal his personality, can give us.

CHAPTER III

WORK FROM 1849 TO 1853

INFLUENCE OF BROWNING AND DANTE

BEFORE the first number of the "Germ" had appeared, and while it was in progress, Rossetti, accompanied by Holman Hunt, paid a short and hurried visit to Paris and Belgium. A rhyming diary and a series of jocular sonnets, interspersed with a few serious ones, recall the vigour of his first impressions. A large proportion of the time was spent at the Louvre and other galleries, rushing through Old Masters at a furious rate.

After their return home Rossetti found his affairs in a bad way. The failure of the *Ecce Ancilla* to find a purchaser at once (it was not sold until June 1853), and the storm of unfavourable comment it provoked, caused him frankly to abandon as unprofitable the mine of semi-religious, semi-mystical feeling which he had

begun to work, and it was some time before he could settle down to find another. Feeling his way pictorially towards the field of romance in which his thoughts wandered, he began to undertake subjects from this class of literature, from Browning, Dante, Keats, and later from the "Morte Darthur" of Malory. His first experiment was a large canvas illustrating the page's song in "Pippa Passes," which soon became impossible and had to be dropped. The composition of it remains, however, in a little painting called *Hist, said Kate the Queen*, dated 1851. Two other designs from Browning which were carried out at this time are a pen-and-ink drawing from "Sordello" entitled *Taurello's first sight of Fortune* and *The Laboratory*. The latter was, in all probability, Rossetti's first attempt at water-colour (it is painted over a pen-and-ink drawing, as several of his early ones were), and bears but slight resemblance either in thought or execution to the work by which he is popularly known.

In addition to these three subjects, Rossetti drew or painted in the years 1849-50 other themes of a romantic and mediaeval nature. Amongst them was his first illustration to Shakespeare, a scene from "Much Ado about Nothing," repre-

senting the happy lovers, *Benedick and Beatrice*, receiving the felicitations of those who had plotted their match.

From the "Vita Nuova" Rossetti took the incident of *Dante drawing an Angel on the Anniversary of Beatrice's Death*, executed first in pen-and-ink, and originally given to Millais. A water-colour of the same subject is of later date, 1853. The latter was bought by Mr. Thomas Combe, of the Oxford University Press, and was bequeathed by his widow to the Tylorian Museum, where it remains.

The "Vita Nuova" also furnished the subject of a small water-colour of 1849, representing *Beatrice at the Wedding Feast denying her salutation to Dante*. The poet, with a friend grasping his arm as if to restrain him, stands watching a procession of figures clad in blue and green, and adorned with roses in their hair. The central figure of the bridal procession is a portrait of Miss Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, who first came into Rossetti's life at about this date. She was the daughter of a Sheffield cutler, and was employed in a milliner's shop off Leicester Square, where Walter Deverell discovered her one day when shopping with his mother. She was persuaded to sit to Deverell for his *Viola*, and

later to Rossetti. Her portrait also occurs in a picture by Holman Hunt and in Millais's *Ophelia*.

Both on account of her romantic history and her individual attractions, the personality of Miss Siddal has always exercised a delicate charm over those who love Rossetti. She was the model for most of Rossetti's earliest and finest water-colours containing women, and probably for all his Beatrices except the last.

To resume the tale of early work, in 1851 Rossetti continued to be engaged on small subjects of a mediaeval or dramatic character. We have, for instance, the charming little group called *Borgia*, in which the famous Lucretia is seen seated with a lute in her hands, to the music of which two children are dancing. Over her shoulders lean on the one side the bloated Pope Alexander VI, on the other her brother Caesar, beating time with a knife against a wine-glass on the table, and blowing the rose-petals from her hair. Lucretia's white gown is of ample folds, with elaborate sleeves, looped up all over with coloured ribbons and bows, a device which so took Rossetti's fancy that he repeated it in *Bonifazio's Mistress* (1860).

In the same year (1851) was produced the

first design for a subject of weird and ghostly conception, called *How they met Themselves*. This depicts a pair of lovers wandering at twilight in a wood, and suddenly confronted with their own doubles. The legend of the Döppelgänger was one of a class of mysterious horrors which greatly appealed to Rossetti's imagination, and which fascinated him from boyhood. Few but he however would have dared to draw it, and fewer still could have succeeded with it. The first design just referred to, was drawn in pen-and-ink, and was destroyed or lost at an early date; but Rossetti redrew it in 1860 whilst at Paris on his honeymoon, and four years later painted two water-colour versions.

To the year following, 1852, belongs a remarkable water-colour, representing Giotto painting a famous portrait of Dante which was discovered on removing the plaster from the wall of the Bargello in 1839. Giotto is in dull red, with brocaded sleeves turned back. To his left is seated Dante, cutting a pomegranate in his hand, and gazing down with a rapt expression to where Beatrice is passing in a church procession. Behind Giotto stands his master, Cimabue, watching the work which is to eclipse his; and behind Dante leans his rival, Cavalcanti, holding in his

hand a book of Guinicelli, symbolizing thereby the three generations of poets.

Nothing else of importance is catalogued under the year 1852, but in 1853 we come to one or two well-known designs and pictures. First may be mentioned the pen-and-ink drawing entitled *Hesterna Rosa*, founded upon the plaintive song of Elena in Sir Henry Taylor's "Philip van Artevelde":

"Quoth tongue of neither maid nor wife
To heart of neither wife nor maid,
'Lead we not here a jolly life
Betwixt the shine and shade?'

Quoth heart of neither maid nor wife
To tongue of neither wife nor maid,
'Thou wag'st, but I am sore with strife,
And feel like flowers that fade.'"

The scene represents two gamblers throwing dice, and their mistresses, one of whom in a fit of shame is covering her face. She is the "yesterday's rose." The other clasps her arms round the neck of her lover, and is singing a merry song. An innocent little child near by is touching a lute, and Rossetti has completed the other aspect of the scene by putting in an ape scratching itself, a Düreresque touch which he added also in the little *Borgia* group. A water-colour version of

the same subject was painted in 1865, and a larger version, bearing the title *Elena's Song*, was painted in 1871.

The starting of *Found* is one of the most memorable events in connection with the year 1853. The subject is a countryman or drover recognizing in a fallen woman of the streets his own lost sweetheart. *Found* was commissioned by a Mr. MacCracken, who was also the purchaser of *Ecce Ancilla*, in 1853, and several studies were made for it. The picture however was never finished. "It was," writes Mr. W. M. Rossetti, "a source of lifelong vexation to my brother and to the gentlemen, some three or four in succession, who commissioned him to finish it." After his death, Sir Edward Burne-Jones consented to give a sort of finish to the picture by washing in blue sky. In its half-completed state it passed into the possession of Mr. William Graham, and after his death it went to America.

* * * * *

A short note on Rossetti's movements during the period just covered may be given here. We left him in 1848, after a few months' work at Madox Brown's, sharing a studio with Holman Hunt in Cleveland Street, Soho, and painting at the *Girlhood of the Virgin*. At the beginning of

1851, he took in common with Deverell the first floor rooms at No. 17, Red Lion Square—the rooms which Morris and Burne-Jones occupied subsequently from 1856 to 1859, and which served as a cradle for the famous firm. In November, 1852, he took a set of rooms at 14, Chatham Place, Blackfriars, on a site now cleared away, overlooking the river and presenting other advantages. Here he remained for nearly ten years, including the brief two years of his married life, and here he accomplished what many judges consider the most interesting portion of his work. He had by now acquired a certain measure of independence as a painter, which went on increasing as generous or wealthy patrons attached themselves. That his progress was slow, and that for many years he was reduced to selling water-colours of priceless beauty for comparatively trifling sums, was the result partly of a determination which he formed never to exhibit his work. This resolve, which later on became a sort of mania, is said to have been due in the first instance to the discouraging reception of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* in 1850. For a long time, of course, it prevented his being known at all or appreciated by possible purchasers, and his work circulated amongst a narrow circle of artistic

friends. In the days of his greatness it may have had an opposite effect by arousing curiosity, and producing a feeling of pique. Buyers were attracted towards a man who was notorious for despising the public eye, and whose work was spoken of with bated breath as something supremely precious. With some few exceptions, however, it is essential to remember that Rossetti's work was absolutely unseen by the public, who became acquainted with him as a poet long before they knew him even dimly as a painter. The effects of this ignorance are still discernible. Even after two great exhibitions of his works in London, and after the publication of a wide selection from his designs, there are people who believe that Rossetti never painted but from one model, and that all his pictures are distinguished by impossible lips and a goitrous development of neck.

CHAPTER IV

FRIENDSHIP WITH RUSKIN.—MARRIAGE, AND DEATH OF MRS. ROSSETTI

WITH the year 1854 Rossetti's life entered upon a new phase. This was the first year of his memorable connection with Ruskin. At the same time he had by now engaged himself to marry Miss Siddal, whose companionship and whose health became, for the next eight years, the most absorbing facts in his private life. To speak of Ruskin first, his was no ordinary friendship, but a curious combination of patron, friend, and mentor. If Rossetti had been a common man, living an ordinary life and working on regular lines, such a connection would have been, as he jocularly described it once, "in a way to make his fortune." For Ruskin was willing to buy within certain limits almost everything that Rossetti produced. Furthermore, having taken a great fancy to Miss Siddal, and admiring her poetic and artistic gifts, which had grown in

a remarkable way under Rossetti's tuition, he tried to make an arrangement whereby he should purchase all her work also, and there is no doubt that Ruskin's help at this critical period was invaluable, and that without it the young couple would have suffered even more struggling times than they did. For Rossetti was hopelessly unthrifty, flush of money one day, out-at-elbows the next, and invariably anticipating any money to be earned from commissions. The Ruskin letters which have been published, throw an interesting light upon this butterfly existence.

Before passing from the subject of Ruskin it is interesting to note that he enlisted Rossetti as an active helper in the scheme promoted by Frederic Denison Maurice for bringing art into the East end. His method of teaching has been described by one who attended his lectures. He began at once with colour. As in his own personality and his own work, light and shade, drawing, and everything else was subservient to colour. Without troubling about the grammar of design he gave his pupils nature to copy and showed them how to copy it. A later generation has come to see wisdom in Rossetti's method, and has introduced it successfully under government auspices in elementary schools.

In 1860 Rossetti and Miss Siddal carried out their long projected plans of matrimony, which had been delayed by the latter's illness, by uncertain prospects, and perhaps also by a final want of resolution on Rossetti's part.

The marriage took place on May 23rd, and the young couple went for their wedding trip to Paris and Boulogne. On their return the rooms at Chatham Place were extended by opening a door into the adjoining house. The independent bachelor habits to which both were accustomed made life as Bohemian and irregular after marriage as before it. Men friends came and went as they pleased; tavern dinners relieved the strain of studio work, and little if any respect was paid to the conventions of social intercourse. Mrs. Rossetti's delicate health alone made it impossible for her to go about much, except amongst devoted and intimate friends, the chief of whom in these days perhaps were Algernon Charles Swinburne and the Madox Brown and Morris families. In May, 1861, Mrs. Rossetti gave birth to a child, still-born, and her slow recovery, added to the phthisical troubles with which she was afflicted, induced a severe and wearing form of neuralgia. For this she was prescribed laudanum, of which, on the night of

February 10, 1862, she unhappily took an overdose. Poor Rossetti, on returning home from the Working Men's College, where he had been lecturing, found his wife already past recovery, and, frantic with anxiety, rushed off to Highgate Rise to summon the ever-ready assistance of Madox Brown. The following morning she died, after but two years of married life clouded with illness; and for a time at least her loss deprived Rossetti of all capacity for work and almost of all interest in his art. The most touching event in his whole career of swift and flame-like emotions is the sudden impulse which led him, as his wife's coffin was being closed, to bury in her hair the drafts of all his early poems, which at her request he had copied into a little book. Only a poet could put into words the dramatic intensity of grief which was expressed in this now historic sacrifice to the memory of Rossetti's dead wife.

CHAPTER V

WORK FROM 1854 TO 1857

ROSSETTI'S work, during the earlier part of the period we have been glancing through, was of a particularly interesting, and towards the latter end of a sufficiently varied character. In range of subject it belongs to the category described in Chapter III, with the important addition that now for the first time is added to his sources of romantic inspiration the "Morte Darthur" of Sir Thomas Malory. This cycle of old Celtic legends had been for many years practically a sealed book in England, and its popularity to-day is largely owing to the interest revived in it by Rossetti, and later by the famous group of Oxford friends, including William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. Rossetti had become acquainted with Malory by 1854, which is the date of that strange, sad little water-colour, *King Arthur's Tomb*, representing, in an imaginary scene, Launcelot bidding a last farewell to

Guenevere. Apart from this Rossetti had in hand a number of drawings which were continually put on one side as fresh ideas crowded into his restless brain, and were often not finished until many years later. The statement could easily be verified, that many, if not most, of Rossetti's later 'pictures were planned during these early strenuous years of his life, so that it is not to be wondered at that the actual finished work of these early years was sparse in quantity and slight in quality—much slighter, for instance, than the two religious paintings with which he had begun his career. On the other hand, for many people these little water-colours of Rossetti's second period have a charm that nothing in his larger and more elaborated later work can recall.

In the early part of 1854 Rossetti wrote to Ruskin that he was occupied with ideas for three subjects, *Found*, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon*, and another which is not named, but which from the context one may infer to have been the water-colour diptych of *Paolo and Francesca da Rimini*. In August of the same year he wrote that he was at work on a *Hamlet and Ophelia*, "deeply symbolical of course," and predestined for the folio which Millais had presented, and which was still supposed to be in

circulation among the members of a select sketching club. About the same time he submitted to Ruskin two designs for *The Passover*, one of which was chosen to be begun at once, while Ruskin also commissioned seven drawings from the "Purgatorio," of which one certainly, *Matilda gathering Flowers*, was very shortly put in hand. None of these undertakings saw the light for at least another year; the *Hamlet* not for four or five. The *Matilda* was finished first and delivered in September 1855, and on the 2nd December Madox Brown records in his diary, *apropos* Miss Siddal being stranded in Paris without money, "Gabriel, who saw that none of the drawings on the easel could be completed before long, began a fresh one, *Francesca da Rimini*, in *three compartments*; worked day and night, finished it in a week, got thirty-five guineas for it from Ruskin, and started off to relieve them." This was the earliest version of a subject that Rossetti returned to more than once, representing in one compartment the lover's kiss, and in the second their two souls floating clasped together in Hell through a rain of pale sulphurous flames. Between the compartments are two figures meant for Dante and Virgil, with the words "O Lasso!" Within the

same period, viz., by October, 1855, another Dante subject, *The Vision of Rachel and Leah*, was taken up and completed.

The Passover drawing, just referred to, is a small, unfinished water-colour, in which once more Rossetti has treated the domestic life or the Holy Family with a reverent freedom from conventionality, such as Millais used in *The Carpenter's Shop* and Holman Hunt in the *Finding of Christ in the Temple*. *The Passover* was one of Rossetti's very earliest designs, having been sketched out first as far back as 1849; it was the one selected for a memorial window to Rossetti in the church at Birchington-on-Sea, where he was buried.

Other drawings which are dated, or were finished by 1855, though they may have been in hand considerably earlier, are *The Nativity*, *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, and the *Annunciation*, all water-colours. In the last-named the Virgin (done from Miss Siddal) is represented washing clothes in a stream, whilst the angel Gabriel stands by with folded wings, between two trees: both are in white, and the picture shows a strong effect of sunlight.

In addition to the foregoing there must be chronicled under 1855 the first of the important

and beautiful designs for woodcuts, which in the absence of his pictures were almost the only means afforded to the public for many years of judging of Rossetti's work. This is a drawing for a poem in William Allingham's "Day and Night Songs," called *The Maids of Elfen-Mere*. Allingham was employed in the Customs in Ireland, and at the period in question, and for some years after, Rossetti and he were very intimate, corresponding freely and vivaciously on all topics concerning their circle.

In 1856 were completed the water-colours of *Dante's Dream* and *Fra Pace*. Mr. William Morris, who acquired several early water-colours by Rossetti, was apparently the first purchaser of *Fra Pace*. The picture represents a kneeling monk busy illuminating at a desk. He has worked so long that the cat has coiled itself up asleep upon his trailing robe. A youthful acolyte is tickling it with a straw in order to beguile the tedium of the long silence. The drawing is somewhat archaic in character and stiff in design, but it is eminently characteristic of Rossetti, full of quaint conceits and humour, from the row of little bottles that hold the good man's pigments to the dead mouse he is copying and the split pomegranate that lies uneaten by his side.

The *Dante's Dream* above mentioned is the first, and in certain points most beautiful, version of the subject which afterwards served for Rossetti's largest picture, the one in the Walker Art Gallery at Liverpool. The water-colour is somewhat squarer in shape, but the composition and pose of the five figures are very much the same as in the large Liverpool picture.

In March, 1856, Rossetti secured an important commission—judged by the standard of his current work and prices—to paint a reredos in three compartments for the cathedral of Llandaff, which John P. Seddon was engaged in restoring. The subject he chose for this undertaking was *The Seed of David*, showing in the centre-piece the infant Christ on his mother's knee being adored by a shepherd and a king, and on either side a single figure of David, first as a shepherd-boy slinging the stone for Goliath, and secondly as a king harping to the glory of God. The triptych was not completely finished until 1864, and after that was considerably retouched in 1869, when Rossetti went down to Llandaff for the purpose.

The year 1856 (or, if we take the date of publication, 1857) deserves commemoration as the year of the famous Moxon "Tennyson," for

which Rossetti designed no fewer than five illustrations.

Separate pen-and-ink drawings exist for most, if not for all, of these Tennyson designs, and water-colours were afterwards painted from three of them.

In point of number and interest the productions of 1857 are remarkable. It was the year of the Oxford frescoes, for one thing, though these dragged on till 1859; and it was the year of a charming little series of water-colours, which were acquired one after the other by Rossetti's newly-made acquaintance, William Morris, who, some time later, being in want of capital for his own business, sold them in a batch to their late possessor, Mr. George Rae. These comprise:

(1) *The Damsel of the Sanc Grael*, robed in green, holding a long-stemmed cup in her hand.

(2) *The Death of Breuse sans Pitié*, one of the crudest and least successful of Rossetti's water-colours.

(3) *The Chapel before the Lists*, a scene suggested by Malory of a lady helping to arm a kneeling knight, her long white head-dress, as she stoops to kiss him, falling like a mantle down her blue dress. Upon the pointed shield

of the knight is a figure of a maiden in distress. Beyond the chapel is a tented field, and knights going forth to joust.

(4) *The Tune of Seven Towers*, a quaint little scene, very characteristic of Rossetti's fertility and originality of invention. A lady in red with mediaeval head-dress is sitting in a high oaken chair, which above towers up into a sort of belfry, and is playing upon a musical instrument which also forms part of the chair. A man in green doublet, with long boots, sits sideways on a stool close by watching her, and a second lady stands mournfully behind. A banner hangs down at the right from a pole which cuts the picture diagonally in half.

(5) *The Blue Closet*, illustrated and described elsewhere.

The Wedding of St. George, in the same collection, belongs to this year, but was not acquired from Mr. Morris. The old story of St. George and the Dragon had a powerful influence upon the romantic school to which Rossetti belonged. Burne-Jones's variations upon it are well known, and Rossetti also, besides treating it as a whole in a series of designs for stained glass windows, painted St. George more than once at typical stages of the adventure. In this earliest version



THE BLUE CLOSET.

he is resting from his feat, clad in armour, with a gorgeous surcoat, whilst the princess kneels and leans her head upon his breast, cutting off a long dark lock of hair which she has bound upon the crest of his helmet. The dragon's head, a monstrous object, stands grotesquely in one corner in a box with ropes attached for drawing it along. In the background is a hedge of flowers and attendant angels playing on bells.

The artistic and romantic impulses stirring in England at the midpoint of the century had, as we have seen, produced one notable movement in the shape of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." Five or six years later they gave rise to another, not less important, and shortly afterwards a fusion of the two took place. The second of these "Brotherhoods"—the word was actually adopted for a time—had its origin at Exeter College, Oxford, in the personalities of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, and resolved itself at first, like its forerunner, into a "crusade and holy warfare against the age," with an added religious tinge which was hardly visible in the other. The Oxford group, like the "P.R.B.," published a magazine to illustrate, not to preach, their principles, and had as a tangible link with Rossetti the same warm appreciation of the

beauties of the Arthurian legend first introduced to their notice by Burne-Jones.

In the Christmas vacation of 1855 Burne-Jones came up to London, and after attending a meeting of the Working Men's College in order to see Rossetti, whom he and Morris had already begun to worship, he was introduced to him at Vernon Lushington's rooms in Doctors' Commons. The next day he visited Rossetti in his studio at Blackfriars, and saw him working on *Fra Pace*. Thus was laid the foundation of an alliance which even more potently than the "P.R.B." has changed the face of art in England, and which resulted in the formation of a group that for combined poetic, literary, and artistic power is unapproached in the history of the nation. Incidentally, it was this visit that determined Burne-Jones—hankering after art, but predestined for the Church—to become a painter; and no one can fail to be struck with the evidence of Rossetti's influence upon his early work.

To the "Oxford and Cambridge Magazine," William Morris's organ, which ran for the twelve months of 1856, Rossetti contributed "The Burden of Nineveh," "The Blessed Damozel" (a little altered from the "Germ" version), and "The Staff and Scrip."

By the end of 1856 Burne-Jones and Morris had left Oxford and were settled in London, occupying the rooms at 17, Red Lion Square, which had formerly served as a studio for Rossetti and Deverell. Both were under the spell of Rossetti's influence. The *ménage* at Red Lion Square lasted till 1859, and was a rallying point for all members of the circle. "From the incidents that occurred or were invented there," says Mr. Mackail, "a sort of Book of the Hundred Merry Tales gradually was formed, of which Morris was the central figure." The rooms were "the quaintest in all London," as Burne-Jones wrote, "hung with brasses of old knights and drawings of Albert Dürer"; and in order to furnish them recourse had to be had to invention. A local joiner was engaged to manufacture furniture from Morris's own designs: "intensely mediaeval" was Rossetti's description of it to a friend, "tables and chairs like incubi and succubi." Next came the idea of painting pictures on walls, cupboards, and doors, about the time that Morris was planning to build himself at Upton, in the neighbourhood of Bexley Heath, a "palace of art" the like of which should never have been seen. In the general enthusiasm Rossetti set to and designed a pair of panels for

a cabinet—the subject of his early pen-and-ink drawing, *The Salutation of Beatrice*, representing in two compartments Dante meeting Beatrice in Florence, and again in Paradise.

At the risk of repetition, one may mention once more a side of the movement which is apt to be overshadowed by its far-reaching results; namely, the light-heartedness and sense of fun which prevailed amongst this band of artistic pioneers. There was nothing of the mawkish affectation which discredited the aesthetes who came after. When Burne-Jones was down at Upton, helping to decorate the Red House in 1860, Rossetti wrote to a mutual friend: "I wish you were in town, to see you sometimes, for I literally see no one now except Madox Brown pretty often, and even he is gone to join Morris, who is out of reach at Upton, and with them is married Jones painting the inner walls of the house that Top built (Morris was always called 'Topsy' by his friends). But as for the neighbours, when they see men portrayed by Jones upon the walls, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed (by *him*!) in Extract Vermilion, exceeding all probability in dyed attire upon their heads, after the manner of no Babylonians of any Chaldea, the land of anyone's nativity—as soon as

they see them with their eyes, shall they not account him doting and send messengers into Colney Hatch?"

During the long vacation of 1857 Rossetti went up to Oxford with Morris on a visit to the architect, Benjamin Woodward, who was at work upon a debating hall for the Union Society, and seeing an opportunity for mural decoration of a kind never previously attempted in England in the new hall of the Union, he became fired with an idea for carrying it out. The hall was a long building, with an apse at each end, and a gallery running all the way round. In this gallery were bookcases, and above the cases were ten semi-circular bays, each pierced with a pair of circular windows. These bays, it was suggested, should be painted with scenes from the Arthurian legend, and the roof, as part of the general scheme, was to be decorated in a harmonious manner. A building committee was in charge of the operations, and without any clear idea of its responsibilities or restrictions it fell in with Rossetti's proposal that he and a select band of artists should execute the work gratuitously, but that the Union should defray their expenses at Oxford and should provide all necessary materials. The time estimated for completing the work was six weeks.

Seven artists, including Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Morris, were enlisted without much trouble, the remaining four being Arthur Hughes, Spencer Stanhope, Val Prinsep, and J. Hungerford Pollen, who had already won much credit from his painting of the roof in Merton College Chapel. Rossetti took as subjects for two bays *Launcelot asleep before the Chapel of the Sanc Grael* and *Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival receiving the Sanc Grael*. The others chose similar themes, but in a short time it was found that the work in hand was considerably more than had been anticipated, though abundant evidence remains of the enthusiasm which was put into it.

Unfortunately the delight was not to be of long duration. Almost before the pictures were finished they had begun to decay, the effect of tempera laid direct upon a new brick wall, with no preparation but a layer of whitewash, being quite inadequate to resist the English climate. Several of the designs were never completed. In 1859 some arrangement was entered into by the Union with a Mr. Riviere to fill the three blank compartments; and after that the ill-fated undertaking, on which so much pains and so much skill had been spent, gradually faded away and resolved itself into what it is to-day, a dingy

blur of colours in which may be distinguished the occasional vague form of an armoured limb or a patch of flowery background.

Rossetti's connection with Oxford, and its intercalation in his work, does not end with the Union paintings. It was destined to furnish him with a more lasting influence—a face that to the end of his life haunted his pictures with an austere and solemn beauty, dominating and transforming all other kinds, so as even to give rise to the suggestion—a shallow and ignorant one, it is true—that he painted but one type of face. It was at the theatre, one night in the summer of 1857, that Rossetti and Burne-Jones found themselves sitting near two youthful Misses Burden, daughters of an Oxford resident, the elder of whom, by her striking features and wealth of dark wavy hair, appealed so forcibly to Rossetti's painter eye that he obtained an introduction in order to ask for sittings. A pen-and-ink head called *Queen Guenevere*, now in the National Gallery at Dublin, and evidently intended to replace the earlier studies done for *Launcelot at the Shrine*, was one of the first fruits of this acquaintance, which, for the rest, does not seem to have become really prolific of results until several years later, when Rossetti's

wife was dead. In the meantime William Morris, whose admiration went even further, had married Miss Burden, and the casual relationship of painter and sitter which existed between her and Rossetti deepened into a friendship, in which Miss Siddal participated, both up to and after her marriage.



MARY MAGDALENE AT THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE
PHARISEE.

CHAPTER VI

WORK FROM 1858 TO 1862

THE year 1858, while the Oxford affair was still in train, saw the completion of two pen-and-ink drawings which had been in hand a long time. These were *Hamlet and Ophelia* and *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*.

The drawing of *Mary Magdalene*, perhaps the most perfect of all Rossetti's early works, was begun at least by 1853, and continued to occupy his thoughts in one form or another for many years. Rossetti wrote a sonnet for the picture, which is found in his first volume, called "Poems."

Another subject finished in 1858 was *Mary in the House of John*. The scene is at late twilight, or in an eastern night, the red glow of the sky casting a purple light over the clustered dwellings of Nazareth, with deep blue hills beyond. In the interior of the room are Mary

and St. John, the latter seated in shadow, engaged in striking light from a flint; whilst Mary, standing before the tall window, fills a hanging lamp from a jar of oil.

Another important item to be recorded under 1858 is a water-colour called *Before the Battle*, painted for Rossetti's American friend, Professor Norton, of Harvard.

The most important work of 1859 is a highly-finished little head in oils, called *Bocca Baciata*, which was bought by the late Mr. Boyce. The model for this was Miss Fanny Cornforth, afterwards Mrs. Schott, whose florid type of beauty reappears in a series of sensuous pictures of the kind that Rossetti began to paint after 1862—*Aurelia (Fazio's Mistress)*, *The Blue Bower*, *The Lady at her Toilet*, *Lilith*, and *The Lady of the Fan*. These pictures, and numerous portraits in oil and water-colour, give a sufficiently recognizable idea of this model, who exercised almost as remarkable an influence over Rossetti's life as over his art.

Bonifazio's Mistress, a specially charming little water-colour, was painted in 1860. It shows a lady (dressed in the same brightly be-ribanded flounces as Lucretia Borgia wears in the little 1851 group) who has been sitting to her lover,

a painter, when suddenly she has fallen back in her chair, dead.

The connection of this subject with the poet, Bonifazio (or Fazio) degli Uberti is entirely fanciful. There can be little doubt that it was intended to illustrate Rossetti's own story of "St. Agnes of Intercession." *Bonifazio's Mistress* has no connection whatever either in subject or composition with the oil painting of the same name done in 1863, and afterwards re-named *Aurelia*. The latter is simply a three-quarter length figure of a lady plaiting her hair before a toilet glass.

This (1860) was the year of Rossetti's marriage, as has already been stated, and in June he was at Paris on his honeymoon. While there he executed two pen-and-ink drawings, one of which was the design of *How they met Themselves*, done to replace the earlier version of 1851, which had been lost. The other represents a scene from Boswell's "Life of Johnson," a curious source of inspiration for Rossetti, rendered more remarkable from the fact that the incident chosen is of a humorous and spicy character. Dr. Maxwell told the story how two young women from Staffordshire had come up to town to consult Johnson about Methodism, in which they

were much interested. "Come," said he, "you pretty fools, dine with Maxwell and me at the Mitre, and we will talk over that subject"; which they did, and after dinner he took one of them on his knee, and fondled her for half-an-hour together.

In 1861 Rossetti's translations from the Italian poets were at last published, together with the "Vita Nuova." Rossetti thought out a very charming design of two lovers kissing in a rose-garden, which he proposed to etch on copper for the title-page. The plate, however, displeased him, and he destroyed it. The central idea of this design reappears in *Love's Greeting*, a panel designed for the Red House, and in a water-colour of 1864 inscribed *Roman de la Rose*, in which Love appears overshadowing the kissing pair with his wings.

In 1861 was painted, on a little panel, 10 by 8 inches, a portrait of Mrs. Rossetti, called *Regina Cordium* or *The Queen of Hearts*, showing just the head and bare shoulders, on a gold ground, behind a parapet on which rests one hand holding a purple pansy. A more important outcome of the year is the fine composition known as *Cassandra*. The subject is a scene on the walls of Troy just before Hector's last battle. Rossetti

wrote two sonnets for the drawing which will be found in his volume of "Poems."

About this time (1861-1862) the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. was just being started, with William Morris, Rossetti, Faulkner, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, Webb, and others as the active promoters of a venture which was to reform the arts of decoration and furniture making. Tapestry, furniture, wall-papers, stained glass, painted panels, and later on carpet-weaving and dyeing, were among the industries to which this band of highly original artists and designers turned their attention. The Anglo-Catholic movement and the demand for decoration of an aesthetic and sensuous kind gave the new firm plenty to do, amongst their first commissions being the embellishment of two new churches then being built by Bodley, St. Martin's on the Hill, Scarborough, and St. Michael's at Brighton. For the former Rossetti executed a design for two pulpit panels and several windows, achieving from the very first a mastery over this branch of art which few designers have surpassed. It is characteristic of his original mind that he went right back to the fundamental principles of *vitraux*, paying no attention whatever to the elaborations which

had grown round them, and recognizing that a picture which was transparent, that is, seen by transmitted light, must be conceived in flat tones and not made to give the illusion of shading, as can be done in the case of a surface from which the light is reflected.

The *Paolo and Francesca* water-colour is generally attributed to the year 1861, although no particular authority exists for this beyond an auctioneer's catalogue. This beautiful little water-colour represents the first compartment of the double subject. In it Paolo and Francesca are seated before a window bearing the arms of Malatesta. Outside is a bright and sunny landscape. The lovers have stopped in the midst of their reading to give the fatal kiss that sealed their doom.

In 1861 or 1862 Rossetti designed two woodcuts for his sister Christina's "Goblin Market," published by Messrs. Macmillan. In 1865 he drew two more designs for "The Prince's Progress." The covers for these two little volumes, as well as for his own when they appeared, were designed by Rossetti, and are as original and effective and tasteful as his decorative work invariably was.

CHAPTER VII

SETTLING AT CHELSEA. WORK, 1863 TO 1874

AFTER the tragic death of his wife, on February 11th, 1862, Rossetti could no longer bear to occupy the rooms they had inhabited at Chatham Place, and began to seek for others. In the meantime he took lodgings for a few months in a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He had a fancy for getting away from the crowd of London, and yet for being near the river, which caused him to examine one or two old houses in the then by no means fashionable neighbourhoods of Hammersmith and Chelsea. He finally decided in favour of No. 16, Cheyne Walk, a house which from some traditional association with Queen Elizabeth became known as Tudor House and is now called Queen's House. It is also said to have been described by Thackeray in "Esmond" as the home of the old Countess of Chelsey. Here he started a joint *ménage* with Mr. Swinburne, Mr. George Meredith,

and (at casual intervals) his brother. Mr. Meredith's subtenancy was not of long duration; in point of fact he never really occupied his rooms. But Mr. Swinburne remained long enough to have shared very considerably the traditions which soon grew up round Tudor House, and whilst there wrote the most famous of his dramas, "Atalanta in Calydon," as well as many of the "Poems and Ballads," and a portion of "Chastelard." The gloom which at first had threatened Rossetti gradually wore away before the robustness of his nature; settling into and furnishing his house on new, and at that time practically unheard-of, principles, afforded abundant distraction; and for some years, until his own illness intervened, Rossetti played the genial and charming host to many old friends of his intimate group, and to an increasing circle of new ones who were attracted by sympathy or by the growing glamour of his name.

One of the charms of the house at Chelsea was its long garden, more than an acre in extent, with an avenue of trees on to which the studio looked. As time went on this garden became tenanted with a miscellaneous assortment of birds and animals, round which a veritable saga of anecdote has gathered. These, with his affection

for bric-à-brac, his spontaneous generosity, his ever-ready wit, his love of good stories, and his endless flow of *vers d'esprit*, form a contrast to the somewhat sombre atmosphere in which he sought his inspirations, and in which, owing to the seclusion of his later years, he was popularly supposed to live.

To resume the thread of Rossetti's work, the well-known picture of *Beata Beatrix*, now in the National Collection, bears date 1863, but was only partially painted in that year, the completion being long delayed. One reason for the difficulty may have been that Rossetti desired to make this picture a living memorial of his wife, and that no regular studies of the face had been done for it. What he felt about it we may gather from the fact that for some years he refused to send out a replica, even when replicas had become a regular and lucrative form of business. In the end, however, he was prevailed upon to paint more than one repetition of the subject, none however equal in quality to the original.

To 1863 belongs a small oil picture called *Helen of Troy*, a full-faced study, head and shoulders only, of a rather pretty model, with masses of rippling yellow hair. The last of the *St. George* subjects also belongs to this year, and

represents St. George in the act of slaying the dragon; a water-colour version of one of the incidents in a series designed for windows, but treated a little differently. Next come three small subjects: *Belcolore*, a very finely painted head of a girl biting a rosebud; *Brimfull*, a water-colour sketch of a lady stooping to sip from a glass; and thirdly, a picture called *A Lady in Yellow*, belonging to Mr. Beresford Heaton. We are now entering upon the period when Rossetti ceased to paint small heads and began to devote himself to larger single figure subjects, lavishing upon them the wealth of his fine imagination, and surrounding them with quaint and beautiful accessories such as he alone knew how to select. The first picture of this type, and in point of execution one of the very finest, is *Fazio's Mistress*, a small oil painting dated 1863, but considerably altered ten years later, when Rossetti renamed it *Aurelia*.

The year 1864 contains two or three more prominent examples of Rossetti's attraction towards a luxuriant and seductive type of feminine beauty. The most important is *Lady Lilith*, which embodies perhaps the fullest expression of Rossetti's power in this direction. Adam's mythical first wife is shown as a beautiful woman

leaning back on a couch combing her long fair hair, while with cold dispassionateness she surveys her features in a hand mirror. "Body's Beauty" Rossetti called the picture afterwards, contrasting it with his conception of "Soul's Beauty," the *Sibylla Palmifera* of 1866-70.

Still in the same vein—of "Women and Flowers"—is the next great picture begun in 1864, the *Venus Verticordia*. The principal version of this, an oil painting, was not finished until some time in 1868. The earliest in point of date is a little water-colour commissioned as a replica, which was delivered during the year. The picture represents the goddess of beauty undraped and standing in a bower of clustering honeysuckle which hides her to the waist. In her left hand she holds an apple, in her right a dart upon which is poised a sulphur butterfly. Others are hovering round. Behind is the grove of Venus, and a blue bird winging its way through space.

The remaining productions of 1864 are all in water-colour. They include *Morning Music*, *Monna Pomona*, *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Bors*, and *Sir Percival*—belonging to Rossetti's earlier manner; *Roman de la Rose*, and *The Madness of Ophelia*, a scene representing Laertes leading Ophelia away, whilst the king and queen are looking on.

In 1865 was painted the *Blue Bower*, a picture of the *Lilith* group, done from the *Lilith* model, and representing in a setting of gorgeous blue and green harmonies a woman playing upon a dulcimer. *The Merciless Lady*, which was painted in 1865, is a return to Rossetti's early romantic compositions, and is a particularly charming specimen. Nor was it his only water-colour of this year, though indisputably the best. For Mr. Craven he painted the subject called *Washing Hands*—with the exception of *Dr. Johnson at the Mitre*, his one experiment in eighteenth century costume.

Another called *A Fight for a Woman*, is one of Rossetti's most spirited drawings. In point of invention this design goes back to very early days, as is proved by the existence of tentative sketches dating from about 1853. To the same date belongs the oil painting called originally *Bella e Buona*, but renamed by Rossetti *Il Ramoscello* in 1873, when it was taken back by him for retouching. It is a half-length figure, dressed in slate green, and holding an acorn branch.

We now come to one of the most beautiful pictures, if not the most beautiful, that Rossetti ever painted—*The Beloved*. No one who has



THE BELOVED.

not seen it, with a warm sunlight bringing out its colour, can form the most remote conception of its brilliance. "I mean it to be like jewels," wrote Rossetti to its late owner, Mr. Rae; and jewel-like it flashes. The picture itself is described in a later chapter, amongst those selected for illustration.

In 1866, the year in which the *Beloved* was finished, Rossetti started upon a second great picture of the same type, the *Monna Vanna*, a three-quarter length figure draped in magnificent gold and white brocade, and toying with a large fan. This was commissioned by Mr. Rae, as was also *Sibylla Palmifera*, the third of the series, begun about the same time but not completed until 1870. Rossetti's sonnet entitled "Soul's Beauty" describes the subject—a Sibyl seated on a throne and bearing a branch of palm.

The record of 1866 closes with an oil portrait of the painter's mother, towards whom at all periods of his life his devotion was exemplary; a large crayon drawing of Christina Rossetti, with her thoughtful face resting on her hands; and two designs for her second volume of poems, "The Prince's Progress."

In 1867 Rossetti painted the oil *Christmas Carol* for Mr. Rae, an entirely different subject

from the early water-colour. This is a half-length figure of a girl, draped in a gold and purple robe of Eastern stuff, and playing upon a species of lute. Two small but pretty pictures of the same date are *Joli Cœur* and *Monna Rosa*. The first represents a coy-looking maiden fingering her necklace, whilst *Monna Rosa* is chiefly a study in beautiful colour, representing a lady in a dress of pale emerald green, with golden fruit worked upon it, plucking a rose from a tree planted in a blue jar.

The next item of 1867 is the exquisite *Loving Cup*. The subject is a lady raising a golden cup to her lips, and standing against a background of fair embroidered linen, surmounted by a row of heavy brazen plates.

The year 1868 was cut into by Rossetti's breakdown in health and sudden anxiety about his eyesight. Nevertheless, he painted the portrait of Mrs. William Morris, in a blue dress, seated at a table before a glass of flowers, which many competent judges regard as one of his very finest pictures, and which was the prelude to that long series of noble canvases by which he has become best known to the public. Mrs. Morris has lent her portrait to the National Gallery, where it hangs (at Millbank) beside the *Ecce Ancilla* and

the *Beata Beatrix*. Other productions of the same year, which closes the period of Rossetti's best work, were *Bionda del Balcone*; *Aurea Catena*, a fine drawing of Mrs. Morris; two studies for a future picture, *La Pia*, and some small replicas of no particular importance.

The insomnia which began to attack Rossetti in his thirty-ninth year, and which was the indirect cause of his subsequent breakdown, led him in 1869 to drop work for a time and to take a holiday at Penkill Castle in Ayrshire, the residence of an old friend. The visit is of interest, because it was not until this occasion that he gave a serious thought to the publishing of his early poems, some of which were still going about in manuscript in a more or less finished condition, though others were buried in his wife's grave. As a relief from the strain of painting, moreover, he began to write again. His first idea was to have the poems, such of them as he could collect or recall from memory, set up in type to keep by him as a nucleus for a possible volume; gradually, however, the idea of publishing outright grew or was forced upon him; and the last obstacle to this, the loss of so much of his early work, was finally removed one day in October, 1869, when, after a consent

wrung from him very reluctantly, the grave was opened, and the manuscript poems recovered. In 1870 the book appeared, having as publisher Mr. F. S. Ellis, of King Street, Covent Garden. The poems proved an immediate and lucrative success, and were favourably reviewed except for the single attack made upon them in a pseudonymous article by the late Mr. Buchanan. The effect of even one attack, however, and it was admittedly a very unfair and bitter attack, on a man of Rossetti's temperament, suffering from nervous fancies, and troubled by want of sleep, was disastrous. He viewed as a great conspiracy against him what other men, in sounder health, would have been able to disregard, and the effect was unhappily permanent. He had begun to acquire the habit of taking chloral as a cure for sleeplessness, without knowing, what is well known now, its lamentable after-effect, and for a short time, if one may accept his brother's judgment, Rossetti was hardly to be regarded as sane. A severe breakdown caused him to be removed once more to Scotland, where after a complete rest he was enabled to resume painting, and in September, 1872, he joined with Mr. and Mrs. Morris in taking the old Elizabethan Manor House of

Kelmscott, on the borders of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. His work here consisted to a large extent in repainting many of his old pictures, which he had sent to him for the purpose. In this way he worked upon the *Lilith*, *Beloved*, *Monna Vanna*, and other important canvases, including even the little early *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. Rossetti left Kelmscott in July, 1874, and returned to London; and that was the end of his connection with the quiet Gloucestershire retreat, which thenceforward became associated solely with the life of William Morris.

During the years 1869 to 1871, and the two following which Rossetti spent at Kelmscott, he was at work on a number of fairly important new canvases in addition to the retouching of old ones. A sprinkling of crayons and small pictures also has to be mentioned. These include the *Rosa Triplex*, a study of three heads from one sitter, now in the Tate Gallery, and *Penelope*, a crayon drawing of a seated figure, which is unique in the respect that it was done from a favourite model of Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

Throughout the year 1870, with one or two exceptions, Mrs. Morris's is the face which figures in Rossetti's work. It is to be seen, for instance, in the fine picture called *Mariana*, really a first

attempt at the portrait in the Tate Gallery lent by Mrs. Morris, to which a second figure was subsequently added.

In 1871 he painted the picture of *Pandora*, of which Mr. Swinburne says, in his "Essays and Studies," that "it is amongst the mightiest of all Rossetti's works in its God-like terror and imperial trouble of beauty." The figure is clad in a long robe of Venetian red, and is holding the fateful casket, from which issues a red smoke, curling all round into clustering shapes, like flame-winged seraph curses. *Water-willow*, a little quarter-length figure with a river landscape behind, done in the same year, is interesting from the fact that it is a portrait of Mrs. Morris, and that the view represents Kelmscott.

We now come to the picture of *Dante's Dream*, begun in 1870 and finished towards the close of 1871, Rossetti's most important work in the opinion of many people, and considerably his largest. The subject is that of the little early water-colour painted in 1856, namely the vision related by Dante as having come to him of Beatrice lying in death, and the angels bearing upward her soul in the form of "an exceedingly white cloud." The picture is more fully described elsewhere.



MARIANA.

Impressive as *Dante's Dream* may be, it is not to be classed on all grounds with Rossetti's finest work. Yet it has been the object of boundless admiration. It has even been said that if no other of Rossetti's works survived but this and the *Beata Beatrix*, they alone would be enough to ensure him a place among the few great artists of the world.

The next great subject in point of date, namely *Proserpine*, has a complicated history attached to it. Rossetti began the picture upon canvas four times in 1872, with ill-success. He took it up again in 1873 and painted a fine version which was spoilt in straining. This was replaced in the same year by a second fine one which arrived at its destination damaged by an accident in transit. A third large picture had therefore to be painted in 1874, which still exists, and finally the damaged picture was patched and partially repainted in 1877, which is the date it bears in the corner. This is the finest and best known version, and is the one of which an autotype reproduction has been published. There are sundry other replicas and crayon studies of the subject which have not been mentioned, but of the earlier attempts nothing now seems to be left in the form of pictures, the canvases having

been cut down into the form of single heads. In all these pictures the subject is the same. The ravished bride of Pluto is seen standing in a corridor of Hades, lighted by a bluish subterranean light, and holding in one hand the pomegranate of which she ate one fatal seed that bound her for ever to her destiny. In none of the pictures done from Mrs. Morris do we find so appropriate the distant air of melancholy with which the painter contrived to invest her features.

Of the other pictures painted at Kelmscott perhaps the most successful is *Veronica Veronese*, supposed to be taken from a passage in the letters of Girolamo Ridolfi, which describes how a lady, after listening to the notes of a bird, tries to commit them to paper, and finally to reproduce them on her violin. In the picture the Lady Veronica is robed in a rich gown of Rossetti's favourite green, with yellow daffodils in a glass beside her. The bird, a canary, is perched on a cage above her. She sits at a cabinet, on which is a sheet with the musical notes she has been writing down; and listening with dreamy blue eyes to the bird's song she lets her thumb wander over the strings of the violin suspended on the wall before her.

Before leaving the year 1872 there is a minor but interesting episode to record. In this year Rossetti took up an old background of trees and foliage which he had painted in 1850, in his Pre-Raphaelite days, when studying with Holman Hunt at Knole Park, near Sevenoaks. Nothing had ever been done to it since; but now Rossetti painted in two women playing instruments and a group of dancing figures, for which very charming crayon studies were made, and called it *The Bower Meadow*. This interesting combination of early and late styles now belongs to Sir J. D. Milburn, of Newcastle.

La Ghirlandata, the next great oil picture by Rossetti, is dated 1873, and is one of those which has already crossed the Atlantic to the bourne whence works of art but seldom return. The picture represents a lady playing upon a garlanded harp, in the midst of a forest clearing, where angel faces peer down upon her, and mystical blue birds cleave the air. The whole is a subtle blending of subdued colour, where blue and green strive for the mastery. Beautiful as it is in these respects, *La Ghirlandata* lacks the invention and the interest of Rossetti's more vigorous early work.

The Damsel of the Sanc Grael, painted in

1874 for Mr. Rae, is a very different picture from the little water-colour of 1856-7. There was a simplicity and primitiveness about the latter which accorded well with the mediaeval sanctity surrounding the subject. When Rossetti came to paint the picture again in his later manner, he represented the austere damsel of the holy mysteries as a handsome girl with flowing chestnut hair, bright lips, and languishing eyes, sumptuously robed in a red gown with a heavily-flowered mantle. In painting this picture Rossetti probably did not seek much beyond mere beauty of form and decoration, in the attainment of which he has succeeded perfectly; and the same may be said in part of a better-known production of the same year, the much-praised *Roman Widow*, which represents a lady seated by the marble tomb of her husband. A large unfinished canvas, painted simply in grisaille, called *The Boat of Love*, was begun at this time but abandoned in 1881. After Rossetti's death it was bought for the Birmingham Corporation Art Gallery, where it is now exhibited. It may be mentioned that the Birmingham Gallery possesses an unequalled collection of Rossetti's drawings, recently acquired (1906) through the munificence of two or three local donors.

One other subject dated 1874 is intimately bound up with Kelmscott. This is an oil picture called by a variety of names—*Marigolds*, *Fleurs de Marie*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, etc., but representing in actual fact a young girl standing in a room, and reaching up to place a mass of yellow marigolds and lilies in a flower vase upon a high cabinet of inlaid wood. The model is said to have been the gardener's daughter at Kelmscott, not that the detail signifies, except as connecting the picture with the place.

CHAPTER VIII

CLOSE OF THE RECORD. 1874—1882

ONE of the first incidents to be recorded after Rossetti's return to London in 1874 was the dissolution of the partnership of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., and the re-construction of the firm under the sole management of William Morris. The dissolution was not effected without some unpleasantness, resulting in the estrangement of Morris and Brown. Morris and Rossetti never actually quarrelled; but from 1874 onwards the two men seldom saw each other, Rossetti's recluse habits of life being possibly responsible to some extent for the severance.

The latter part of 1875 and the first half of 1876 Rossetti spent at Bognor, and after that he visited the Cowper-Temples (afterwards Lord and Lady Mount Temple) at Broadlands in Hampshire, being then engaged upon his picture of *The Blessed Damozel*.

In 1877 he had a very severe physical illness, due to an uraemic affection which had been set up in 1872, and which eventually was the active cause of his death. He was removed to a little cottage near Herne Bay, and at one time gave up all hope of resuming his profession. "At last," says Mr. William Rossetti, "the power and the determination returned simultaneously; he drew an admirable crayon-group of our mother and sister, two others equally good of the latter, and yet another of our mother. Weather had been favourable, spirits and energy revived, and he came back to town nerved once more for the battle of life and of art." The group of Mrs. and Miss Rossetti is now in the National Portrait Gallery.

After 1877 Rossetti seldom if ever went beyond the doors of No. 16, Cheyne Walk, and as he suffered from fits of melancholy, and disliked being alone, a few faithful friends formed the practice of coming to visit him by turns. Mr. Theodore Watts was a more constant attendant, and had a bed at his disposal. A good number of acquaintances also frequented the house, some of them much more intimate than others and dating back in their relations to about 1866. Among these may be mentioned the artists

J. M. Whistler and Alphonse Legros, Frederick Shields, F. A. Sandys and Fairfax Murray.

In 1878, or thereabouts, Rossetti's devotion to poetry received a fresh impulse, and he set himself assiduously to the production of sonnets. It was not until 1880, however, that he began really to compile materials for a new volume. In that year he wrote "The White Ship," and in the year following "The King's Tragedy." Finally, by March of 1881 the copy for "Ballads and Sonnets" was complete, and was accepted by Messrs. Ellis and White on the same terms as the first book. At the same time the latter, which was by now out of print, underwent some material alterations and was re-published in a new form.

The pictures for 1875 include *La Bella Mano*, which represents a lady washing her "beautiful hands" in a scalloped basin of brass; also some of the studies for the *Blessed Damozel*, a finished pen-and-ink study for a great picture of 1877, the *Astarte Syriaca*, and a large pencil drawing called *The Question* or *The Sphinx*.

The following year was mainly devoted to the *Blessed Damozel*, an attempt to realize on canvas Rossetti's early poem which first appeared in "The Germ." The picture is a very fine one.



ASERTE SYRIACA.

(By permission of the Art Gallery Committee of the Manchester Corporation.)

Rossetti filled in the background behind the stooping figure of the damozel with a heavenly landscape, in which were countless pairs of embracing lovers. In 1877 he added a predella representing the earthly lover gazing up through space, and in 1879 he painted a replica, omitting the background of lovers and substituting two angel heads rather suggestive of those which occur in *La Ghirlandata*.

The year 1877 contains but three items, two of which are, however, the important oil-pictures *Astarte Syriaca* and *The Sea-Spell*. The third was a *Magdalen* bearing the vase of spikenard.

Astarte Syriaca is a massive figure, with face and hair strongly reminiscent of Mrs. Morris. It was bought at its first owner's death for the Corporation Art Gallery of Manchester.

The two finished items of 1878—for as the years advance the output grows less and less—are *A Vision of Fiammetta* and a water-colour study of a head called *Bruna Brunelleschi*. *Fiammetta* is a fine and striking conception, representing on a life-size scale the lady beloved by Boccaccio, to whom he addressed the sonnet which begins: "Round her red garland and her golden hair, I saw a fire about Fiammetta's head." The sitter for *Fiammetta* was Mrs. W. J. Stillman.

La Donna della Finestra was painted in 1879. This "Lady of the Window," also known as "The Lady of Pity," is she who in Dante's "Vita Nuova" is described as looking down upon the poet one day when he was overcome with grief. The head is taken from Mrs. Morris, much modified by the conventions which Rossetti at this time introduced into all his faces. Not the least charming feature of the picture is the clustering mass of beautifully painted fig-leaves growing up to the balcony in which the lady sits.

During 1880 and 1881 Rossetti was occupied with three large pictures, *The Day Dream*, *The Salutation of Beatrice*, and *La Pia*; with *Found*, which had been re-commissioned by Mr. William Graham; and with several replicas, of which the most important was the smaller *Dante's Dream*.

The Day Dream is a portrait of Mrs. Morris seated in the lower branches of a sycamore tree. *La Pia*, the last original picture painted by Rossetti, depicts the story of Pia de' Tolomei, told in the fifth canto of the "Purgatorio." In Rossetti's canvas she is seen, sitting forward in a window, gazing out over the poisonous Maremma from the fortress where her husband had placed her to die. *Found*, which was one of the first pictures Rossetti attempted, was never

completed. After Rossetti's death, as already mentioned, Sir Edward Burne-Jones added a little work to it, and in this condition it was taken over by the purchaser. It is now in America.

With this we come to an end of Rossetti's work as a painter. It remains briefly to close the record of his life.

In September, 1881, Rossetti, accompanied by Mr. Hall Caine, undertook an expedition to the lake district of Cumberland; but after a month his health, which at first had appeared to benefit, became alarmingly bad, and he returned hurriedly to London. After a partial recovery from this illness his work was once more interrupted in December by an attack of nervous paralysis, traceable to the effects of the drug he had been taking. In February, 1882, he was taken to Birchington-on-Sea, where a cottage had been placed at his disposal, and here he died on the 10th of April. He was buried, quietly and simply, in the little churchyard at Birchington, where a stone monument has been erected by his family in the form of a Celtic cross designed by Madox Brown. A memorial window embodying his own early design of *The Passover*, adapted by Mr. Shields, was also set up in the adjoining church.

So passed away, in the fifty-fourth year of his

life, one of the most original artists of our time ; I will not say one of the greatest painters, for that would invite controversy as to points in which he was, and knew himself to be, deficient. But as an artist, as one who saw, and could interpret and depict beautiful things in a beautiful way, there can be no two questions about Rossetti's greatness. Never before has one man blended so perfectly the sister gifts of poetry and painting that it was impossible to pronounce in which he was superior.

To complain, as some have done, of the mediæval quality of his subjects is foolish. As well complain that fairy tales are old. Rossetti *was* mediæval in his thoughts and tastes. Without any affectation or straining for effect he lived his intellectual life in a mystical, richly-coloured world of romantic knights and ladies. These, and not the hedgerows or buttercups of to-day, were what came to the surface in his creative moods. We have witnessed in these latter years a great revival of romance, springing up in various ways all over the continent of Europe. Of this revival in England, on the side of pictorial art, Rossetti was the fountain head. The gentle melancholy that pervades his work was derived from his namesake Dante, to whom he was doubly allied by

ties of birth and sentiment. "He was moreover driven by something like the same unrelaxing stress and fervour of temperament, so that even in middle age it seemed scarcely less true to say of Rossetti than of Dante himself:

‘Like flame within the naked hand,
His body bore his burning heart.’”

The direction of his influence, and of the Pre-Raphaelite movement generally, has been worked out in a scholarly manner by Mr. Percy Bate, in a book called "The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters," where an attempt is made for the first time to trace the artistic lineage of such diverse executants as Mr. Spencer Stanhope, Mr. Walter Crane, Mr. Strudwick, Mrs. de Morgan, Mr. Byam Shaw, and others. On many of these the influence of Burne-Jones is more evident than that of Rossetti; but Burne-Jones himself owed much to Rossetti at the critical period of his career.

The subject of Rossetti's art is one that presents difficulty, on account of the semi-privacy which surrounded it during the painter's lifetime. The subject of Rossetti himself is more difficult still. It has become a sort of fashion to decry the man, and to forget the genius, among some who

knew him only in his latest years—perhaps by hearsay mainly. Stories of his want of consideration for others, his egotism, his shabby treatment of patrons, his ungoverned temper, are reeled off with a sort of zest, as though they summed up the man. But in Rossetti good and bad were, as usual, inextricably mixed up, with a strong preponderance towards the former. There were periods when his brilliant, impulsive, magnetic personality swamped the most audacious faults. For a man to stand out above his fellows is often enough a signal for petty jealousy and stone-throwing. But in such cases, one may remark, it is not always a David who prepares the sling, nor is it always the giant who is on the side of the Philistines.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

ROSSETTI'S record as a painter divides itself naturally into three periods, beginning with a fairly numerous series of small romantic water-colours, which to many people represent the most charming, if not the most mature, feature of his work. The subjects for these were selected largely from Browning, from the "Vita Nuova" of Dante, and from the Arthurian legends, themes which appealed irresistibly to his imaginative mind, and which formed a common link between the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the later group of young Oxford men which included William Morris and Burne-Jones. Practically the only oil pictures painted by Rossetti during this period were the *Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, and the little *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, now in the Tate Gallery at Millbank. This period came to an end in 1862, with the death of Rossetti's wife, and the beautiful *Beata Beatrix* (also in the Tate Gallery) which was really a memorial of

her pure features, was followed by a number of magnificent canvases painted from models of a rich and sumptuous type, amongst which may be specially mentioned *The Beloved*, *Monna Vanna*, and *Sibylla Palmifera*, *Lady Lilith*, the *Venus Verticordia*, *The Loving Cup*, *Veronica Veronese*, *The Bower Meadow*, *La Ghirlandata*, *Sea Spell*, and *La Bella Mano*. Lastly comes a large group of single figure subjects painted from, or based on, the dark and almost exotic features of Mrs. William Morris. Of these may be named in particular *Mariana*, *Pandora*, *Proserpine*, *Astarte Syriaca*, *La Donna della Finestra*, *The Day Dream*, and Rossetti's last finished picture *La Pia*.

Owing to an invincible dislike for exhibitions, and the secrecy which in consequence hung over Rossetti's work, the two earlier groups were hardly seen by the public at all until after his death, and his fame, when it spread, was based chiefly upon the large canvases of the latest group, which may account for the very general belief that Rossetti painted only from one type of sitter, with somewhat exaggerated characteristics, a further error which may be explained by the mannerisms which undoubtedly beset him towards the close of his life, when his health had

failed permanently and his eyesight was no longer at its best.

Of the earliest pictures, painted for the most part when Rossetti was little more than a boy, the following are selected for illustration:

(1) *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, which was exhibited in 1850 and helped to bear the brunt of the vigorous onslaught which was made in that year upon the pictures of the newly formed Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. There is nothing which could possibly shock us now in the simple, girl-like figure of Rossetti's Virgin, crouching in half-awakened awe upon her pallet couch before the grave-faced angel who is holding out to her a lily. In many ways it is a far more reverent treatment of the scene than one is accustomed to in old Italian canvases with their sumptuously robed madonnas and angels gay with peacock-wings and jewelled trappings. The painting, too, is a masterpiece for so young and inexperienced an artist, full of skill in the handling of white draperies and restrained in the use of colour. The only bright notes in the picture are the crimson cloth worked with a lily, upon a stand at the foot of the bed, and the blue curtain at its head. Everything else is subdued and faint

with the clear light of an English, not an Eastern, dawn, seen through the open window which frames the golden head of the angel.

(2) *The Blue Closet*. This was painted in 1857, and formed one of a notable series of small water-colours which once belonged to William Morris. Although neither Dantesque nor Arthurian in subject, it is strongly akin to the latter class in its feeling for mediaeval chivalry and dress, and has been chosen because both in colouring and composition it is one of the most perfect examples of Rossetti's early work. It represents two queens, the one on the left in red with green sleeves, and the one on the right in crimson and gray, playing upon opposite sides of an inlaid clavichord or dulcimer. Two other ladies stand behind them singing. Blue tiles on the wall and on the floor suggest the title, which in its turn gave rise to one of William Morris's poems.

The next illustration given, as typical of Rossetti's intermediate period is—

(3) *Beata Beatrix*, which was bequeathed to the National Collection by Lady Mount Temple, to whom it formerly belonged. This is so well

known from reproductions that it is unnecessary to describe it in detail, further than to say that it represents symbolically the death of Beatrice as set forth in the "Vita Nuova." Beatrice is not dead, but is seated on a balcony in a trance, whilst standing a little way in the background watching her are Dante and the figure of Love. A crimson bird, the messenger of Death, is letting fall a poppy into her lap. Beatrice is robed in pure green, such as Rossetti loved to paint, with faint purple sleeves. A dial marks the fateful hour which was to bear her, on that 9th of June, 1290, "to be glorious under the banner of the blessed Queen Mary." On the frame, designed by Rossetti himself, are the first words of the lamentation from Jeremiah, *Quomodo sedet sola civitas*: "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people." There is a replica of this picture in the Corporation Art Gallery of Birmingham, but it was an unfinished one which was worked on after Rossetti's death by Madox Brown.

Our next illustration is from a pen-and-ink drawing, and is typical of a branch of work in which Rossetti excelled almost as notably as Burne-Jones. It represents:

(4) *Mary Magdalene at the house of Simon the*

Pharisee. The date of this famous drawing is 1853, but it was not actually finished until some years later. The scene represents a procession of revellers, amongst whom is the Magdalene with her lover. In passing the door of Simon she sees within it the face of Christ, and striving to leave her companions she tears off the garland from her head and presses up the steps. Christ is watching her, and waits for her to reach him, whilst the others try to bar her passage. A young doe is cropping the bush which grows against the wall of the house.

(5) *The Beloved*, painted in 1866, is probably the most perfect of all Rossetti's pictures. The subject is the Bride of the Psalms advancing to her lover. "She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework; the virgins that be her fellows shall bear her company." In the centre of the group is the bride, arrayed in such gorgeous stuffs as only Rossetti could imagine, of an indescribable green with flowing sleeves gorgeously embroidered in gold and red. On her head is an ornament of scarlet oriental feather-work which flashes like a jewel. Four dark-haired maidens accompany her, whose heads form a frame to her own beauty, and in front a

little negro boy, with jewelled collar and head-band, bears a golden vase of roses. The figures, though life-size, are only painted half-length. The faces are not of the type usually associated with Rossetti, and form a sufficient answer in themselves to those who think that he never painted from more than one model. The bride's, in particular, is a face of extraordinary beauty. *The Beloved* is one of a fine trio of pictures commissioned by the late Mr. George Rae of Birkenhead, the other two being *Monna Vanna* and *Sibylla Palmifera*. As stated already, they represent Rossetti's prime, when his work was technically at its best, and before his health had broken down and driven him into forced or morbid mannerisms.

(6) *Mariana*. This picture belongs to 1870, and was at one time in the great Graham collection. The title is taken from "Measure for Measure," and has no connection with Tennyson's poem. It was begun originally in 1868, as a portrait of Mrs. Morris, and in most essentials resembles the beautiful picture lent by her to the Tate Gallery. Rossetti discarded the canvas at the time in favour of the latter version, but took it up again afterwards, painted in the figure of the boy

singing, and gave it the Shakespeare name with the legend from the page's song, "Take, O take those lips away." In the Tate picture Mrs. Morris is seated at a table before a jar of roses; here the lady is holding an embroidery frame, but in each case she wears a gown of marvellous blue with contrasting chains and jewels.

(7) *Dante's Dream*. This, from its size and on other grounds is regarded by many critics as the most important of Rossetti's pictures. It is certainly the most popular, and if frequent reproduction be any gauge, stands high amongst all modern pictures in this respect. Its painting occupied the greater part of 1870 and 1871, and was a great physical strain, so much so that in the year following Rossetti suffered from a severe break-down which permanently affected his health. The subject, and practically the composition also, are the same as in a small water-colour of 1856, and represents the vision related by Dante in the "Vita Nuova" as having come to him of Beatrice lying in death and angels bearing upward her soul in the form of "an exceedingly white cloud." Love, in a flame-coloured robe, is leading him up to the bier, and scarlet birds, typifying love, are flying in and out of the house. Two



handsome maidens, in flowing gowns of green, are holding up the ends of the pall which covered the bier, while Love bends down and kisses the pale face of the dead lady. Beyond the arched doorway is seen a glimpse of Florence with the Arno. The picture when finished proved too large for its owner's room, and changed hands more than once before it finally found a resting-place in the Walker Art Gallery at Liverpool. Rossetti painted a second rather smaller picture, to replace it, and added two predellas to the subject.

(8) *Astarte Syriaca* is a vision of the Syrian Venus, massive and splendid in form, with vague eyes typical of her mysteries. She stands, facing the spectator, in a robe of gorgeous green, which half reveals the outlines of her body, clasping with both hands her jewelled girdle. On either side behind her are attendant spirits bearing torches. The picture is a good example of Rossetti's latest work. It was commissioned by the late Mr. Fry and painted in 1877. It now adorns the Corporation Art Gallery of Manchester.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF CHIEF PICTURES

- | | OWNER |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1847. Portrait of the Artist (pencil). | |
| <i>National Portrait Gallery.</i> | |
| 1849. The Girlhood of Mary Virgin (oil). | |
| <i>Lady Jekyll.</i> | |
| The Laboratory (water-colour). | |
| <i>C. F. Murray.</i> | |
| 1850. Ecce Ancilla (oil). | <i>Tate Gallery.</i> |
| 1851. Borgia (water-colour). | |
| 1852. Giotto painting Dante (water-colour). | |
| <i>Sir John Aird.</i> | |
| 1854. Found (unfinished oil). | <i>S. Bancroft, Jun.</i> |
| Arthur's Tomb (water-colour). | |
| <i>S. Pepys Cockerell.</i> | |
| 1855. Paolo and Francesca (water-colour dip-
tych). | <i>Rae Collection.</i> |
| Rachel and Leah (water-colour). | |
| <i>Beresford Heaton.</i> | |
| 1856. Dante's Dream (water-colour). | |
| <i>Beresford Heaton.</i> | |
| Fra Pace (water-colour). | <i>Lady Jekyll.</i> |

OWNER

1857. Designs for Moxon's Tennyson (woodcuts). *Birmingham Art Gallery.*
Chapel before the Lists (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
The Tune of Seven Towers (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
The Blue Closet (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
Wedding of St. George (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
Christmas Carol (water-colour).
C. F. Murray.
1858. Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon (pen-and-ink). *C. Ricketts.*
Before the Battle (water-colour)
Prof. Norton.
1859. Bocca Baciata (oil). *C. F. Murray.*
Salutation of Beatrice (oil).
F. J. Tennant.
1860. Bonifazio's Mistress (water-colour).
C. F. Murray.
Lucrezia Borgia (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
Seed of David (oil triptych).
Llandaff Cathedral.
1861. Dr. Johnson at the Mitre (water-colour).
C. F. Murray.

OWNER

1861. Paolo and Francesca (water-colour).
W. R. Moss.
 Regina Cordium (oil). *Arthur Severn.*
 Parable of the Vineyard (Morris windows).
St. Martin's, Scarborough.
 Crucifixion (Morris window).
St. Martin's, Scarborough.
1862. St. George and the Dragon (cartoons for
 Morris windows).
Birmingham Art Gallery.
 Tristram and Yseult (cartoons for Morris
 windows).
1863. Beata Beatrix (oil). *Tate Gallery.*
 Belcolore (oil). *C. F. Murray.*
 Fazio's Mistress (oil). *Rae Collection.*
1864. Lady Lilith (oil). *S. Bancroft, Jun.*
 Venus Verticordia (oil).
 Venus Verticordia (water-colour).
Rae Collection.
 Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival
 (water-colour). *Beresford Heaton.*
 Madness of Ophelia (water-colour).
Mrs. C. E. Lees.
 How they met Themselves (water-colour).
S. Pepys Cockerell.
 Joan of Arc (water-colour).
Beresford Heaton.

OWNER

1865. The Blue Bower (oil). *Perrins Collection.*
 The Merciless Lady (water-colour).
C. F. Murray.
1866. The Beloved (oil). *Rae Collection.*
 Monna Vanna (oil). *Rae Collection.*
- 1866-70. Sibylla Palmifera (oil). *Rae Collection.*
1867. Christmas Carol (oil). *Rae Collection.*
 Joli Cœur (oil). *Miss Horniman.*
 The Loving Cup (oil). *T. Ismay.*
1868. Portrait of Mrs. Morris (oil).
Lent to Tate Gallery.
1869. Rosa Triplex (crayon). *Tate Gallery.*
1870. Mariana (oil). *F. W. Buxton.*
1871. Pandora (oil). *Charles Butler.*
1872. The Bower Meadow (oil).
Sir J. D. Milburn.
 Veronica Veronese (oil). *W. Imrie.*
1873. La Ghirlandata (oil). *J. Ross.*
 Proserpine (oil). *Charles Butler.*
1874. The Roman Widow (oil).
F. Brocklebank.
 Damsel of the Sanc Grael (oil).
Rae Collection.
 The Boat of Love (grisaille).
Birmingham Art Gallery.
 Marigolds (oil). *Lord Davey.*

- OWNER
1875. La Bella Mano (oil). *Sir C. Quilter.*
 The Question (pencil).
Birmingham Art Gallery.
1876. The Blessed Damozel (oil).
Perrin's Collection.
1877. Astarte Syriaca (oil).
Manchester Art Gallery.
 The Sea Spell (oil).
 Portraits (Mrs. Rossetti and Christina
 Rossetti) (crayon)
National Portrait Gallery.
1878. Fiammetta (oil). *Charles Butler.*
1879. Donna della Finestra (oil). *W. R. Moss.*
 The Blessed Damozel (oil).
Hon Mrs. O'Brien.
1880. Dante's Dream (oil). *W. Imrie.*
 The Day-dream (oil). *Ionides Collection:*
South Kensington Museum.
1881. Dante's Dream (oil).
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.
 La Pia (oil). *Russell Rea.*

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